Music For Square Dancing

Calvin Campbell

Do you ever wonder how other dance format get new dancers? People choose a type of dance to learn based on several preferences. Music, ease of learning the dance style, companions, leadership, facilities, mode of dress, etc. etc. The goal of the dance leaders is to build a combination these factors that will attract the most people. If the mixture of factors is correct, then the recreation survives. If not, it dies.

Of the factors mentioned above, music is usually the most important factor. New square dancers expect to hear square dance music. They want music that makes them want to move. If the dancers don't like what they hear, they leave.

A large majority of people can hear the beat of the music and love to move to music. However, at first, few people attempt to do anything with their feet, but tap their toes. These prospective dancers need to be shown how to walk to the beat of the music.

As the leader, the caller needs to pay attention to what the people are doing, That will tell you how much they like the music you are playing. If the music is good, dancers will tap their toes. Some may clap their hands. They may sway or wiggle or jerk or twitch depending on the type of music.

About 90% of the general population of people will be able to walk to the time of the music by the end of the first couple of dances. You will be surprised at how many will struggle during the start of the first dance.

The ability to walk to the time of the music is critical to the success of the "team" action in square dancing. Every dancer needs to complete each action/movement in the same number of steps. If they don't, then the successful "team" aspect fails to occur. Many present square dancers have no idea of how the music is related to the number of steps it takes to do any square dance "basic." Their leader has never bothered to teach them.

Since most new prospective dancers make their choice of whether to stay or leave depending on whether they like or dislike the music, the choice of music is important. The choice of music for beginner dance parties or the first dance lesson is critical.

Music, suitable for square dancing, is music that is organized around a set formula. The tune is organized in groups of eight beats. The caller should be able to easily recognize the groups of eight beats of music. This is the "phase" of music. If the caller can't hear the "phrases", the dancers will also not be able to hear them.

The dancers should be able to take one step to each beat of music. When the music is played, the dancers should be able to clap their hands in time to the music. At first, the dancers may not be able to hear the "phrases." With experience, they will start to time their actions to fit the "phrases."

Most of the recorded music produced by the present square dance music producers is organized in "phases." However, the same thing cannot be said for some of the alternate sources of music used by many callers. Much of the present popular music is not designed for dancing. It's designed for either listening or some other kind of body movement.

If you can't clap your hands or tap your toes to a piece of music, it probably will be a poor choice for square dancing. This doesn't mean it's bad music. It's just not suitable for square dancing.